

“Like Abraham--25 Years Later”

As I get started this morning, I am very humbled and grateful to all who shared in our celebration yesterday. It's been twenty-five years as a Pastor and it has gone very quickly. It was thoughtful to think of this anniversary. So, thank you for going to all the trouble yesterday and for making it a blessing for myself and also for my family. Thank you for inviting our family to be a part of Grace and this community. And especially I thank the Lord for all that the Lord has allowed me to be a part of in these 25 years.

The 25th anniversary of my ordination today has moved me to reflect on the Abraham's first 25 years from the point of leaving his home in Ur to the day Isaac was finally born. So, for today's reading I share with you from Genesis 21:1-7.

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” ⁷ And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

When the Lord called Abraham in Genesis 12, we are told that Abraham was 75 years old when he started out. He was called Abram then and he was just a young senior citizen at that time—not even middle age yet actually because he lived to 175 years. Here in Genesis 21, we are told that Abraham is 100 years old with Isaac is born. For twenty-five years Abraham obeyed the Lord and trusted in the promise of a son.

This morning I can imagine Abraham sitting on the front porch of his tent rocking Isaac and thinking back on those first 25 years with the Lord. A lot had happened in 25 years. First, Abraham passed thru the land of Canaan Gen 12:6-9. Then a famine sets in forcing Abraham to Egypt. Out of fear for his safety before Pharaoh he lies and says that Sarai is just his sister instead of wife (A half-truth as Sarah was his half-sister). Sarah was still considered a very beautiful woman in her upper sixties. Pharaoh learns the truth and sends them away (Gen 12:10-20). Afterward, Abram returned from Egypt to Bethel Gen 13:1-4 and then separates from Lot (Gen 13:5-18) because they both had been so blessed that their herds needed to find more space. Later Abram would have to rescue Lot from being carried off as a prisoner by the five kings. Abraham wins the battle with 318 trained men (That's a lot of faithful help). Then he meets Melchizedek and offers a tithe Gen 14:1-24. A 2nd Covenant with the Lord is made on the basis of a sacrifice Gen 15:1-21, no doubt hinting of Jesus. Ishmael is born Gen 16:1-6 (86 yrs old). This of course, was a lapse of trust in the Lord by Sarai and Abraham. Eventually, God approaches Abram with a 3rd round of Covenant making—this time instituting Circumcision in Gen 17:1-10. This is also where God renames Abram to Abraham (The father of many nations) and Sarai to Sarah. In Genesis 18 Abraham receives three visitors, makes a meal for them and intercedes for Sodom. However, Sodom is destroyed and Lot escapes to Zoar Gen 19:1-38. In a brief stay in Gerar Abraham once again lied that Sarah was only his sister to protect himself. Abimelech was straightened out by the Lord and Abraham confessed his sin and then interceded before the Lord for Abimelech much to Abimelech's relief Gen 20:1-18. Finally, after 25 years of life in Canaan, came the birth of Isaac.

A lot can and does happen in 25 years. I can see the Lord's hand on my life as Abraham did his. I do not rise to the level of Abraham by a long stretch but I can see important similarities that illustrate God's goodness in my life as it was in Abrahams. So, like Abraham I received a call to be a servant of the Lord as Pastor. Like Abraham we have had to leave home to live in places we had not previously known, always with a sense of anticipation. Like Abraham I have been blessed with a godly wife who has been there every step of the way putting up with my faults, my fears, and adapting herself to being a pastor's wife and moving around from one place to another. Like Abraham we have met many people along the way and have multiplied blessings with each church we have been part of through the relationships we have gained. Like Abraham we have counted on the Lord to lead, but haven't always been a perfect follower. Like Abraham the Lord has blessed

me with two boys—only in my case by the same mom. Like Abraham we count on the Lord's promises especially those that come from Jesus who was promised to Abraham back in Genesis 12. A lot happens in 25 years but the Lord is consistent and present in every one of them.

As a quarter century gives way to what may come, I lay a heavy emphasis on the people we have come to love. I give thanks for everyone that has been part of our journey to this point not just here at Grace but also where we started at a Redeemer in Seymour, and St. Luke's in Winamac as well; even our Vicarage congregation before that and my home church in Michigan at St. Trinity. We are still very fond of each and remember those whom we have known that have already been called to the Lord. I wish now I could have captured each of them on video and shared them with others. Each place has a special memory and an attachment. St. Trinity is where I grew up. Vicarage at Salem, Illinois is where I met Tricia. Seymour is where Josh was born, Winamac where Kyle was born. Grace is now our home where the boys were confirmed and married. Each step was an accumulation of experiences that prepared us for what came next. Who knows what the Lord has in store for us next? However, like Abraham, the Lord will see to it that we have what we need. Like Abraham, the Lord may occasionally correct a wandering course. Like Abraham I will keep learning and growing with each new year. Most of all, Like Abraham, may the Lord always be the center of everything of my remaining years of service however long they become. So, Jesus thank you for 25-incredibly-fast-years.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30